

## Time for Governor Ehrlich to put the Pedal to the Metal

### A “Close to Home” piece by Nancy Floreen

If Governor Ehrlich is really serious about relieving traffic congestion, he has got to think big – and he has to do it right now, in time for the opening of the General Assembly next month.

Last spring he appointed the Hellmann Commission to brainstorm funding options for transportation. They met throughout the fall and chose a goal of raising \$1.8 billion over six years, or \$300 million a year. Folks, let’s be honest; that’s not enough by a long shot.

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT), the Governor’s own team, estimates that it needs \$17.1 billion between now and 2010 to fund its transportation obligations statewide. Its current funding will only cover 38% of the projected cost. If the State added new revenue of \$300 million a year, it will only get 67% of the dollars needed. To get us where we really need to go – the full range of projects that everyone agrees are necessary to relieve us from congestion - we will need an additional \$1.27 billion a year -- more than four times as much.

And even that MDOT figure is understated. It assumes only \$529 million for transit capital expansion, much lower than the cost of the \$800 million for the Corridor Cities Transitway, the \$2 billion Purple Line/Bi-County Transitway, and several billion for rail expansion in the Baltimore region.

That’s why, with all due respect, \$1.8 billion over six years isn’t close to “good enough.” We can’t afford to sell our transportation needs short - that will only continue to frustrate our residents and hurt the business community. We have to think bigger.

In Montgomery County alone, the Council’s 10-year transportation blueprint requires six billion dollars in State transportation funding, or \$3.6 billion more in the next six years. The State would have to raise much more funding than the Commission is currently considering just to meet Montgomery County’s needs alone.

When I recently testified before the Commission, I reminded them that between 1990 and 2000 Montgomery County experienced 21 percent of Maryland’s population growth and 25 per cent of its employment growth, yet received only 10 per cent of its highway dollars. This mismatch must be corrected.

Simply put, the transportation pie needs to be much bigger – and Montgomery County, as the state’s economic engine, ought to get its fair share.

A reliable transportation funding plan serves many critical priorities: cleaning our air, getting heavy trucks moving more safely through the region, and facilitating travel –

for jobs, commerce, civic or personal purposes. An equitable balance that maintains existing infrastructure, constructs much-needed roads, and supports substantial transit expansion will more than justify its considerable cost.

If Governor Ehrlich wants to truly be the “transportation Governor,” he cannot just hang his hat on the InterCounty Connector.

He needs to replace the \$500 million in Transportation Trust Fund dollars already diverted to other programs this year.

He needs to establish a bold transportation budget that actually serves the demand: at least at the \$7 **billion** dollar level. The Governor will have to pull all conceivable resources together. Equally important, he must ensure that no transportation revenue is diverted to fund other government services, as happened this year.

We do not need another poll – or more political cover - to tell us what congestion relief is going to require. There can be no doubt that funding our roads and transit is going to cost a bundle. Years of indecision and debate carry a high price tag. But we were all elected last year to find solutions to problems, not to wring our hands and pass the buck.

It is not enough that the Montgomery County Council has done its part by increasing bond funding limits and approving substantial transportation impact taxes. Now it’s the Governor’s turn to be a leader. # # #

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